



## Foster Care Awareness Campaign

Make A Difference...One Child at a Time

### **Who are foster children?**

Children in foster care have suffered at an early age. They have been abused, neglected, abandoned or exploited, and in most instances taken away from families who were unable to give them adequate care.

### **What is life like in foster care?**

Some children stay in foster care for only a few weeks or months while their parents get their lives back on track, but thousands of others cannot safely be returned home and "grow up" in foster care. Babies who were drug-exposed at birth may go directly into foster care from the hospital. Older children often enter the foster care system without warning -- they have no chance to say goodbye to friends, neighbors, or teachers. They leave home without their favorite stuffed animal and without pictures of their family. They may end up in unfamiliar schools and distant parts of town. Brothers and sisters may be separated and have few, if any, opportunities to visit. While some are cared for by foster parents, others live in group homes where paid staff provides care to youth in rotating shifts. Children in our state's foster care system are moved from one placement to another an average of four times, typically without advance notice, giving them few opportunities to form permanent attachments. Their primary contacts are social workers with high caseloads and high turnover rates.

### **What are some of the results?**

Children enter foster care already at risk for emotional, behavioral, developmental, and physical health problems due to the abuse and neglect they have experienced. About three quarters will perform below grade level in school, and nearly half will not complete high school. Medical records for foster children are often fragmented and incomplete. Health care is inconsistent. Once they leave the foster care system, typically around age 18, many are ill prepared for independent living -- more than half are unemployed, almost a third will become homeless, and one in five will be incarcerated within two years.

### **What can be done to improve life for kids in foster care?**

The whole community needs to get involved. Taking children away from their biological parents is one of the most devastating actions our society takes. When we place children in foster care, the community as a whole must assume the duties and responsibilities of parenting; we are collectively obligated to provide for and sustain these innocent children.

As individuals, there is also much we can do, ranging from a lifetime commitment to a few moments of our time. We can step up to adopt a child and give him or her a permanent, loving home. We can become foster parents to children who need a warm, safe and nurturing environment. We can volunteer as a Court Appointed Special Advocate and work with needy children in dependency court. We can hire and train foster youth for employment so, as they approach age 18, they are prepared to face life on their own. We can give of our time to serve as a tutor or donate the extra personal items so many children in foster care may lack. We can even donate gifts to make sure children's birthdays are not forgotten or lost in the shuffle. For more information, contact Children's Law Center at (323) 980-1700.